

## **Letting go of the Past is a Process: A Psychoanalytic Lens into the Life of Sasha**

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In the book, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Jennifer Egan is portraying life in the music industry. Some of her characters are musicians, and some are somehow connected to the music industry. Nevertheless, it is hard to tell what her book is entirely about because it gives so many different messages. However, she also sent the message that past experiences can have a negative psychological effect on a person. Egan showed that with numerous characters throughout the book, but it stuck out with one character in particular: Sasha. She showed up throughout the entire book in different stories, and she definitely did some crazy things, one of them was becoming a kleptomaniac, during her life. Since Egan did not put the stories of the book in chronological order, it is hard to identify why Sasha was doing the things she did, but as the book brought up more situations of her past, like her college life and when she ran away to live in Naples, it became clear as to why Sasha made some of the choices she made throughout her life. Many situations in Sasha's life shaped who she became in her adulthood, and though she is seeing a therapist, it is still some things that happened in her life that she is not able to let go of because it has a psychological impact on her mind, whether she knows it or not.

Many of us hold on to things because they hurt us, but what we may not always realized is the psychological impact it has on our mind. Not letting go of the past can harm us and negatively affect us psychologically. We all must let go of the things of the past that hurts us if we want to move on with life. If we do not let go, we cannot only hurt ourselves, but also those around us that we care about. "As psychoanalytic theory tells us, we all encounter life-events, as we grow up, that shape our psychological development, and these early experiences tend to play out in our adult lives" (Tyson 81). A perfect example for Lois Tyson's explanation of early

experiences having an impact on a person's psychological development is when a woman grows up and does not receive any nurturing love from her mother. When that woman grows up and starts having her own children, there is a strong possibility that she will be distant from her children, and she will not show them much love because she did not receive any from her mother. The woman can hurt her children without even trying to or knowing she is doing so because she has psychological issues that developed when she was younger, and she carried those issues into her adulthood with her children. Her behavior can be classified as 'dysfunctional.' "[...] all those little (or big) ways in which we put ourselves unnecessarily at risk, get ourselves in trouble, or hurt the ones we love" (Tyson 81). The woman, without a doubt, is hurting herself and the ones she love, even though the love does not show on the surface. She may not know she has any issues, and if she does know, she would repress those feelings because she does not want to deal with the issues. Her mothering skills, or lack of, can be carried over into her children, and when they have children, there is a possibility they will be exactly like their mom. Developing psychological issues because of past experiences can be a never-ending cycle, if a person does not acknowledge the issues and reach out for help.

Since Egan's book is not in any chronological order, it is hard to quickly identify why Sasha started having the problems she has. However, it started to become clear why she grew up to have a fear of abandonment. Sasha's youngest appearance in the book was when she was only a toddler. In the story "Goodbye, My Love," while her parents were arguing, her Uncle Ted took her to the beach. The argument was something that she should not have been around, especially at five years old. Unfortunately, things did not get any better for young Sasha. Shortly after her father divorced her mother, he disappeared out of her life. Even though her mother eventually remarried, the damage her biological father had done when he abandoned her had already

caused her issues. "Children who experience high levels of divorce stressors, high fear of abandonment, [...] are a particularly high risk-group that could benefit from interventions" (Doyle, Sandler, Tein, Wolchik 415). If Sasha would have received help when she was younger, maybe she would not have grown up to have the issues she is dealing with in the book. However, Sasha's issues only increased.

Sasha did not just lose her father; she also lost her best friend, Rob, when she was 21 years old. After Rob died, there is no clear evidence in the book that she had a close relationship with anyone in her life after him. Sasha's father leaving her, and her best friend's death definitely caused her fear of abandonment. Throughout the book, she is never in a serious relationship nor does she care to get close to anyone, especially men. It makes sense as to why Sasha is so distant from a man she went on a date with named Alex in "Found Objects", even while they are on their date. In the story, the two slept together the night of their date, and afterwards, Sasha acts like nothing has happened. Alex takes a bath, leaves, and they never speak to one another again.

Not only does Sasha have a fear of abandonment, she can also be diagnosed as a kleptomaniac. "The diagnosis of kleptomania is reserved for those exceedingly rare individuals who engage in non-sensical shoplifting of items they neither want or need" (Burke & McNeilly 116). The items she steals, like the child's scarf and the plumber's screwdriver, she did not need, and she definitely did not want them. When Sasha is in a session with her therapist in "Found Objects," she does not want to say that she "steals." This small detail shows that she is in denial about being a kleptomaniac. She represses those negative feelings in the unconscious part of her mind, and of course, it has a negative effect on her mind. "The preceding section has emphasized the importance of the role played by the affects, those fundamental predicates or characteristics of the unconscious mind" (180).

Sasha's shoplifting habit that came out of nowhere; she has been shoplifting since she was only thirteen years old. When she first started shoplifting, there is not any reason as to why she was doing it, except for the fact that "it made her whole body glow" (Egan). As time went by, Sasha became an expert at shoplifting, and her habit became handy when she was in Naples. In "Out of Body," she revealed to her best friend how she had survived in Naples after she ran out of money: she became a professional shoplifter and seller of the stolen items. It was clear why Sasha began to steal and continued to do it in her adulthood: stealing gives her a thrill, and it challenges her, especially when the owners of the objects she is stealing is physically close to her. At first, it could be assumed that Sasha started stealing because she was in Naples and needed the money, but it was so much deeper than that. In the book, it was clear that Sasha has not had a very enjoyable, happy life, but whenever she steals, it makes her temporarily happy because she was not happy with herself. "He [Shneidman] defined PP [psychological pain] as an introspective experience of negative emotions" (Meerwijk & Weiss 404). Sadly, stealing is the only thing Sasha is extremely good at doing, and in her mind, it is the only piece of happiness she has in her life. She has gone through so much in her life that she feels like in order for her to be happy, she needs to steal. However, she is unknowingly causing herself a lot of psychological pain.

Even though Sasha has a number of issues that she is dealing with, Egan shows that Sasha is able to move on from her negative past experiences. Egan also shows how it is not all about the issues that Sasha has, it is all about how she overcame obstacles in her life and moved on from everything she has been through. In the story "Great Rock and Roll Pauses," it has become clear that Sasha has overcome her fear of abandonment when she and Drew, her ex-boyfriend from college, reconnected. It is seen as a sign that not all men who enters her life is

going to abandon her, especially when her and Drew get married and had children. It can be assumed that this act of commitment between her and Drew shows her that she does not have to worry about being abandoned anymore, especially since they reconnected and fell in love with one another again after so many years of being away from one another. When Sasha and Drew got married and had their two children, everything begun to fall into place for Sasha. She has turned her life around, and she does not talk about the things she has done in her past. It is not as if what she has done in the past never happened, Sasha has channeled her energy into making sculptures, which are definitely a reflection of her and her life. "Eventually her sculptures fall apart, which is 'part of the process'" (Egan). Sasha's past is not something that she wants her children to know about her, which is another reason why she chooses not to bring her past experiences to light, no matter how much her daughter asks. Sasha has moved on with her life, and she is finally happy; she does not need to steal to feel happiness like she did before. There is no need for her to talk about her past negative experiences, especially when she has done so much to leave those experiences where they belong: in the past.

Too many individuals allow their past experiences to negatively affect their futures. There is no doubt that when something dramatic happens in life, instead of turning it into something positive, majority of us allow it to hurt us psychologically, and we hold on to its negative effects. At first, Sasha did that to herself. She allowed herself to be lonely. She did not get close to anyone, and she would not allow anyone to get close to her for majority of her life. She had lost two important men in her life, and she did not know how to move on from it. However, positivity came when Drew came back into her life. He showed her that it was possible for her to have someone in her life that would not abandon her, and that is when she let go of every negative aspect of her past. Sometimes, it takes for a positive individual to come into our

lives and show us how important it is to move on. Even when we go through the worst, there is always someone out there who can make us forget about it all just by being there through the hardships. Indeed, Sasha is one of the lucky individuals who is able to move on from her negative past experiences and actually still have something positive in her life through the hardships of her past, and that something is her marriage with Drew. If we choose to hold on to past experiences that hurt us, it can potentially ruin our lives. It is best to let go of everything we cannot change, and if we want to change it, we should go out and get help. We should ever let negative past experiences cause us psychological pain. Eventually, the pain can cause us to behave in a dysfunctional manner, which can deepen the issues we may already have.

Through Sasha, Egan shows that even when a person has hardships in life, there is still a great chance that he or she can find happiness. Sasha does not have an easy life in the book, not at all. However, she is able to overcome the obstacles that she has in her life. Egan is sending the message that no matter what obstacles life may put in the way, it is important not to get too wrapped up in issues. It is normal for everyone to go through some hardships in life, but it is even better if those issues do not consume a person's entire life. There are many things in life that are not far, but it is up to us as individuals to accept the fact that we have to move on from those situations, and they are meant to be in the past. It is okay to move on, and the hardships never have to be forgotten.

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